

**Approved Summary of
Initial Meeting of the Taunton Bay Advisory Group
6 PM Tuesday August 7th
Hancock Town Office
Co-Facilitated by Ron Beard and Sherman Hoyt
University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service**

Present: Ron Beard, Mike Briggs, Senator Dennis Damon, Representative Rob Eaton, Norman Hodgkins, Sherman Hoyt, Lee Hudson, Doug Kimmel, Slade Moore, Steve Perrin, John Sowles, and Les Stratton.

Ron introduced the group as the Commissioner's interim¹ advisory committee leaving it up to the group to decide whether or not and how they wish to continue. The purpose of tonight's meeting was severalfold:

- 1) to get to know each other and work together,
- 2) understand both the legislature's and DMR's intent,
- 3) decide how the group is to operate, and
- 4) Develop a long term map of process to frame issues and identifying priorities.

Sherman recommended, and the group augmented, the following set of ground rules to allow everyone to get chance to be heard and achieve fair representation of time:

- One person to speak at a time.
- Don't disturb meeting flow.
- Practice active listening – understand where others are coming from
- Speak to issues
- Don't attack individuals or organizations
- Treat others as you like to be treated
- Leave the discussion if you can not control temper
- Do not blame others.
- Use 'I' language where possible

Ron reviewed his and Sherm's role as facilitators. They see themselves as neutral and do not work for anyone else. The role of Senator Damon as Convener is to be apart from the DMR but associated with government. In essence, the convener is above the vested fray yet familiar enough with government process and issues to be able to address and hopefully resolve questions and concerns brought forward by individuals of the group or group at large.

Senator Damon then shared his thoughts with the group. The moratorium on dragging above bridge was set prior to his entering the legislature. The possibility for a comprehensive management plan emerged through a convergence of several separate initiatives. There was statewide Bay Management project that sponsored two pilot projects, one of which was in Taunton Bay conducted by local citizens interested in the bay and the DMR's proposed comprehensive resource management plan for the bay.

¹ Sowles post meeting point of clarification – "interim" merely means transitional to whatever the group wants to make it.

Bay Management is not a broad brush approach. It must be specific to the uniqueness of the area to be managed. The DMR proposal suggests details on how bay could be managed through use of science, stewardship, and adaptive management. The key component that must remain in the plan is that bay is common resource for the whole state, with its many uses. We can't dismiss any uses, not recreational, commercial, marine harvest, historical, nor future uses. Non-commercial resources are also significant and important as well as the habitat value of Taunton Bay to non-marine species that depend on the bay. We must all acknowledge that overharvesting has been a problem in Taunton Bay and elsewhere on the coast. There is the real danger that human greed and egos, if left unchecked or unmanaged, will lead to overfishing. The plan must prevent overfishing and abuse. Senator Damon noted that he comes from a fishing family. As an example of unchecked harvests, his bay in Trenton was closed to clamming for 5 years rebuild the clam population only to have it clammed out in 4 days after it was reopened. No controls had been put in place to prevent it. The challenge here is to find out how to create a plan for sustainable harvest. If what this group develops has a broad base of support, he is willing to move legislation to support it. But it must have that broad base. This plan could become a model for resource and people management.

John read George's letter (attached) and emphasized the Department's and his own commitment to the project.

Sherm summarized the key points

- model
- public resource
- all uses historic and future
- sustainability
- grow resource

We then entertained comments, questions and answers.

- Steve asked what authority we have to regulate use versus the resources themselves.
- John noted that resource managers really regulate people and activities. Rarely do they actually manage the resource.
- Dennis noted that if a use is damaging resource, then that use needs to be regulated.
- Norman – Access to the bay is a big issue. Now this publicly owned bay is private access only. So there are issues around letting the public enjoy Taunton Bay.
- Doug asked what is the "bay"? Is it the entire watershed or just the water?
- John suggested that the group focus on the bay itself but that if source of an identified problem is in watershed, then we deal with it there.
- A question arose about the group's authority.
- John reiterated that the Commissioner can not, nor can he legally, cede public trust authority to the group. But, he is sincerely looking for the group's advice.
- Slade commented that we need to refine our definition of sustainability. We need to be clear we are striving for both ecological sustainability, functions and processes as well as commercial and cultural sustainability.

- Lee summarized sustainability as having three components - environmental, social, and economic.

Sherm highlighted what he saw as key tasks from the report to help guide the group forward.

- find common ground
- establish governance for bay
- address confidentiality issues
- clarify goals and objectives
- organize and convene meetings with broad range of interest
- revise workplan
- advise state on findings
- oversee harvest assessments

Tonight's focus is on governance.

A question came up about what was meant by harvester assessments. John noted that lack of harvest data specific to the bay is a problem if we are to know how to manage the resource. There might be several ways to collect this while respecting confidentiality. We will need to develop this further with a comfort level that is acceptable to the harvesters themselves.

Steve noted that we already have lots of resource information, including eelgrass maps, economic values, lobster buoys, etc. to help us with assessments.

Ron suggested that before we work on the governance, each of us share a little about our interest in the bay and expectations or hopes for the management plan.

- Norman would like us to help manage the bay's resources, keep the worm industry tradition alive, and open access to bay for all.
- Mike did not see that the bay had a huge problem.
- Doug owns Tamarak place and loves the area. He likes science and data in general and hopes to keep Taunton Bay productive, beautiful and multifaceted.
- Dennis would love to see a governance structure come out that serves as model for local participation in resource management.
- John is interested in sustaining the ecosystem itself, supporting the local community and developing a model to help the state manage other areas.
- Lee would like to prevent loss of access to resource by other people.
- Slade would like this to serve as a model. He sees Taunton Bay as potentially vulnerable and there are a lot of reasons to be concerned and working on this. He would like to see the process turn into something that will protect the shoreline and bay.
- Rob noted that we too frequently make decisions on lack of knowledge. This is a model to supply information and facts to make decisions that support mgt.

- Steve listed a number of declines over his 74 yrs and noted the “sliding baseline” phenomenon. Flounder are gone, shorebirds are gone and he doesn’t know why but wants to know why. There is construction on every bluff. This landlocked bay is strongly influenced by its watershed. Is the eelgrass dieback due to drought? He hopes we can figure out sustainability so as not to have to watch the decline of one species after another. Bring back what has been lost to bring back qualities of past. We can’t go completely back. Our priority is sustainability of resources and uses. He used the example of v-notching which means leaving half the resource behind. It may be a hard model but it recognizes we won’t take it all.
- Les lives on bay. He would like to see group work on sustainability, keeping the bay a priority and let the rest of us fit it.

Ron then asked how the group wants to govern itself.

- Les wants open discussion with an attempt to get consensus that represents the broadest view. Everyone should come with open mind.
- Doug noted the importance of a minority report. We should attempt to get consensus from majority but if that is not possible, have a way for minority views to be expressed.
- Rob thought a process similar to the Marine Resources Committee that includes discussion of the pros, cons, as well as information from those neither for nor against a particular position is worthwhile and makes for a more informed decision.
- Dennis – if not unanimous and other views, then let several minority reports.
- Steve – one of our jobs is to try to educate and convince one another while being willing to change mind. We need hard work of discussion to get agreement based on convincing evidence.
- Dennis – must still recognize there might be some who won’t get there, and must leave opportunity to express their opinion/position. Will a facilitator be available?
- John – yes, if the group wants one.
- Lee – how to share thoughts.
- Doug suggested that this process include drafts for review so people can think about proposals and those who aren’t present can know what was proposed. This avoids people not showing up and then complaining. He would like everyone who participates to commit to work out problems here with group. Everyone to try hard to be at meetings. If someone misses 2 meetings, then the facilitator or convener should talk with that person to see if person is still interested.
- Lee suggested that we work out a schedule.
- Ron said that he hears that we should try in all cases to reach full agreement. But that if agreement is not possible, then we make sure all views are represented in minority report(s).

On the subject of subcommittees, John offered to convene teleconferencing to avoid travel.

Lee would like starting out with whole group before going to subcommittees.

Steve supports meeting of the whole. We've got to learn how to listen.

On subject of chairperson or spokesperson- we did not resolve this.

- Doug was inclined not to talk with media since we have lot of work to do first.
- Others noted that silence is best way to fire up the press
- Steve noted that we are public body and that transparency is important.
- Lee would like DMR to be spokesperson.
- Dennis said he'd be comfortable talking about charge to group but not details of group discussion.
- Ron asked what qualities would make a good spokesperson.
- Mike – someone unbiased,
- Slade – experience speaking extemporaneously, someone who can keep in mind mandate of group, who can share personal opinion but need to be clear that it is personal opinion
- Lee – trusted by group
- Ron – need to think about this for next meeting.²
- Ron asked how many people are needed to make decision. Quorum?
- Doug – we really can't represent groups. Ultimately we represent ourselves.
- Lee – we can't represent an industry unless chosen to represent them
- Ron – we may not be able to represent industry but we can represent background and expertise.
- Slade - if we have a workplan with dates for discussion then this will be predictable and people will work to attend.
- Steve – we should have a requirement to come to one major decision per meeting. We can always revise it late if needed by moving forward is important.
- There was general agreement that 8 members of group needed to be present to make a decision.
- Doug would like to see topic focused meetings rather than process focus.
- Ron asked if there a draft workplan to propose for next meeting or the upcoming year of meetings.
- Slade is willing to help John and Sherm.
- Dennis – if we schedule a topic and want to bring in the public, should we come to decision then or wait till next meeting? Later gives chance to digest similar to Legislature's hearing process.
- Doug – we need to remember that there might need to be intermediate meetings.
- Ron asked what are the most important issues needing to be addressed.
- See Sherm's flipchart notes.

In closing, members offered thoughts on what was good about tonight.

- Lee – food!!
- Steve- we were all at same level
- Les – lots of opinions were shared

² I (Sowles) forgot that a week or so prior to the meeting, both Sowles and Perrin were interviewed for a Coastal Zone Management newsletter about the project.

- Lee – grateful to Senator Damon and Representative Eaton for attending and showing interest.
- Steve – DMR representation.
- Doug – everyone talked
- Dennis – facilitators– everyone was heard and facilitators did it well.

Recap of Action items

- John to write up draft minutes in next week (sorry folks).
- Sherm to send John flipchart notes.
- John to figure out next meeting schedule (3rd Tuesdays of month, e.g. September 18th looks promising).
- John to mail hard copies of material to everyone
- John tasked to fill in missing members
- Slade, Sherm and John to draft up a workplan of priorities.
- Items for next meeting agenda
 - spokespersons
 - draft work schedule.

Meeting adjourned 8:45.